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## Split

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**Split**

by

**Darci Kellen**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Creative Writing and Environment

Program of Study Committee:  
Mary Swander, Major Professor  
Steve Pett  
Donna Niday  
Clark Ford

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2009

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## Television Towers

Past the screaming old pigs  
whose smell seeps into the car  
even with the windows all the way up,  
past the corn and soybean fields

and the house with Christmas lights  
that spells NOEL year round,  
the television towers stand winking.  
Two sets of tall red lights

each separate, apart from each other  
Dad tells us girls *I can turn those two into one*  
the more he drives, the closer together they become  
*keep watching*, he tells us *don't blink*

magically, the two towers match up  
and look whole  
and in that short moment I hold my breath and wish  
that they would stay that way forever, one.

But as we drive on, they split  
further and further from each other  
until it seems impossible  
they ever matched up.

## The Move

We moved in a middle of a snowstorm,  
wind howling like an old coyote.  
Our house is surrounded by empty fields,  
deep ditches, all full of snow.  
When Dad goes to work,  
Mom and I watch Mr. *Rodger's Neighborhood*  
he tells us that he likes us just the way we are  
she rubs her pregnant belly,  
and she cries because he is her only friend.

## Joy

I was already four when Joy  
burst into my world  
destroyed what I thought  
was perfect family  
One dad one mom one girl

When she was really little she wouldn't  
tell anyone what she wanted.  
I always knew but wouldn't say  
until Mom or Dad would plead  
We watched each other,  
Sad-eyed Joy and I

It was a battle to be loved the most  
She was the fighter.  
would bite and pull my hair  
And I, always the performer  
would cry to get attention  
Even make things up that she did

if I had to.

## To the Potluck

The day Dad finally does  
turn our yellow Nova around  
it wasn't even us girls in the back  
with kicking feet  
that makes him do it.

It is Mom, green beans in her lap  
eyes on the clock with her *Where were you*.  
First he stops and looks at her,  
then jerks the car around.  
A silo's shadow swims by, then empty fields.

We watch as she tries to reach for the wheel  
her arm white and glowing  
and scream together for him to turn back,  
to somehow undo,  
water streaming from our eyes and noses.

When he does turn us back around,  
faces us towards the party,  
towards the lights in the distance,  
we realize we did not win the fight.  
Instead, we are facing our punishment,

we now have to pretend.  
She uses her compact to cover the blotches,  
we practice turning up our mouths.  
The reused Kleenex, the soggy coats,  
the salty casserole, all try to get ready.

My Mom, Before

She is skinny,  
frail wrists sticking out of sleeves,  
delicate fingers pushing back bangs  
from clear blue eyes.

Ours is the last trailer on the lot,  
From the window, past the old pickup,  
you can see lizards and sand  
and a shadow of a distant mountain

The desert haunts her;  
The only place she is always warm.  
Here, she is heat, she is cactus,  
she is the rattle of the snakes.

## Spring

We found Dad sitting  
on the hill next to those tulips  
that magically came up every year.  
He kept finding four-leaf clovers,  
we all kept finding them,  
Mom with her belly now giant,  
let us put our hands on her  
to feel the kicking and laughed with us,  
it was a sign that something great was coming.  
She put the clovers in a frame on top of the piano  
to remind us of our luck.



## Twins

She had twins, a surprise.

The doctor had not believed in ultrasounds.

And so the second was discovered only after the first was born.

The doctor told my parents, "There is going to be another."

And then our baby split in half and became two.

The twins shared secrets.

They had giant bug eyes that took us in while we rocked them.

They laughed as we developed ways to tell them apart:

different names, hairstyles, different colors of the same outfit.

We were drawn to their singularity of movement.

## What We Were

There are the pines, small,  
not yet tall and wide  
me, on my little yellow bike,  
wobbling down the gravel drive.  
We are playing softball

Dad, the pitcher, with a full beard,  
a tan and no wrinkles,  
throwing to Mom,  
her big eyes and wavy hair,  
her long thin arms and thick lips.

She looks at the camera,  
Wipes her hands on her jeans.  
The twins are walking,  
one behind the other,  
as if they would never be apart.

We are on the best swing set ever.  
Suzie is hanging from the bar upside down,  
her shirt falls exposing her round tummy,  
she straightens it, it falls again.  
I am pushing the twins on swings.

The lawn is mowed.  
Our fence is not broken.  
I climb to the top of the tall slide,  
fix my hair, and slide down,  
the whole time waving.

## The Story

We had this dehumidifier,  
it was ugly and loud.  
There was something wrong with it.  
It sucked the air from the sky, turned it to water  
then it emptied out from a hose into a bucket.

The bucket would get very full  
my dad would haul it to the bathroom and dump it.  
My parents would argue about this bucket.  
It was too heavy for mom to empty when it was full;  
my dad did not understand why she would wait that long.

My sisters were now walking and touching.  
One only a step behind the other, wide eyes open,  
searching for a new adventure.  
They were never apart.

One of their favorite things to do was dip  
their matching hands into the bucket.  
They would splash the water onto the carpet  
then tickle their toes across the puddles.

It was in our basement.  
Mom was in the next room. Dad was at work.  
I was at school. Joy was upstairs getting a snack.  
Maybe Sara had leaned over and looked into the bucket  
Maybe she saw the reflection of herself.  
Or maybe it was Lucy, her sister,  
she saw in the water and decided to join her.

She fell into the bucket of water and died.  
Her twin was there the whole time, watching.

### After it Happened

Joy is the one that found our sister  
Lying on the floor of our basement  
She had gone upstairs to get crackers  
must have hoisted herself with little hands  
way up on the cracking counter top  
so she could reach the cupboards  
She was only three with thin blond hair  
big brown eyes and a down-turned mouth  
When she came back down she must  
have had the pack of cracker in her mouth  
she always used two hands going down the stairs  
she could see the scene from there  
crackers in her mouth down one step  
hand over hand on the rail  
I don't know if she went up to our sister  
If she touched her or talked to her  
All I know is she found mom in the other room  
and told her that Sara was wet

### Friday the Thirteenth

I am in second grade and already know  
that bad things happen on this day  
some kids stay up late at night

watch scary movies and tell us about it  
I get off the bus at the end our long drive  
and see my dad in his car waiting for me

He is shaking  
He says he doesn't know if Sara will live  
Gives me a choice of where to stay

Says my other two sisters are at one house  
I choose the other  
He says that he thinks it would be good for

My sisters to have me with them.  
I say I don't want to go there  
Dad drops me off at Alan Lonichan's house

Alan and I play up in the barn rafters  
To escape his mom rubbing my back  
And patting my head when I am near

### At the Hospital

My sisters and I wait in a small room  
with Lucy and Sara's godparents  
Dad comes in and tells us that Sara is brain dead  
That there isn't anything they can do.  
He cries  
The adults pat him and cry too  
Some of the adults get to go see her  
But dad doesn't let me  
Tells me that he doesn't want me to see  
her connected to machines  
Doesn't want me to remember her like that  
I imagine her little body connected to machines  
tiny wires coming out of her nose and fingertips  
That is the only way I can think of her

### After the Funeral

Our babysitter's kids came over with gifts  
Said their mom told them they had to be nice  
I said that I was the saddest

Because I always liked Sara the best  
Told them that they couldn't be sad  
because they liked Lucy better

We were all playing in the basement  
The only thing that was different  
was the yellow bucket she drowned in was gone.

The babysitter's kids said Sara looked  
so peaceful lying in the casket at the funeral  
I didn't even know that she was there

I did know that before they buried her  
they burned her body up, she was only ashes  
underneath the smooth marble stone

that had a picture of Mary and baby Jesus  
we didn't go there very often  
because it made mom cry too much

## Twins

Sara was always the leader  
She was the first to crawl the first to walk  
Dad said Lucy let her be the first  
Sara took wobbly steps and we all cheered

Lucy watched then took her turn  
with far less bumps on her butt  
We have a picture of Sara and Lucy  
They are in the bathroom

Sara is holding an empty box of corn starch  
Lucy is standing behind her  
Covered in the fine white powder  
Sara's giant eyes are looking up at the camera

Lucy's giant eyes are looking at Sara.  
After Sara died Lucy kept looking for her  
At night she would point her tiny finger  
Up at Sara's empty crib



Lucy

Lucy is now eight and is our darling  
With wavy brown hair and rosy cheeks  
Her smile is big and eyelashes long  
She is a picky eater so Dad lets her eat  
Sugar cereal and oatmeal packets for every meal  
She can't be left alone always needs someone  
Right next to her.

Joy, age 10

Joy is chubby and bossy  
Is a daddy's girl  
She has made it her life's mission  
To do everything better than  
I did when I was her age  
I just ignore her  
Because I couldn't care less

### Being Thirteen

Thirteen is fresh on some girls-  
shiny cherry lip gloss,  
sparkle of green eye shadow,  
jingly long earrings,  
that perfect pair of jeans.

I watch from my dark corner,  
my hair crunchy from spray,  
cover-up flaking off of zits,  
my earrings just a little too long,  
too jangly.

At home I am one of them,  
toss my hair just so in the mirror,  
my lips pursed, my dimple flirting,  
playfully punch the surrounding boys  
spotlight following my every move.

## Shrink

After my sister died and my parents divorced,  
they send me to see a shrink  
He is tall with the palest blue eyes I have ever seen.  
Instead of making me lie down on some crazy couch,  
he gets out a board game and asks me about life.  
I tell him about skiing in Colorado  
(I've never been)  
and about the time my waterbed popped when I was sleeping  
(never had one)  
and how everything is just fine  
(it isn't).

### Dad Pacing

She is gone.  
We watch him, my sisters and I,  
talk to himself as he walks  
back and forth  
and back and forth.  
We try to interrupt him,  
ask him for food,  
for a glass of water,  
to read us a story.  
He can't hear us  
he can't see us,  
he keeps walking.

### Colored Glass

After mom left, she started collecting colored glass.  
When my sisters and I would visit her small apartment,  
we would rub our chubby fingers across  
the vases and bottles in the windowsills  
when she wasn't looking.

The dust was quick to fly from the glass  
and as the sun streaked through the windows  
the particles would dance in shades of blue and green.

She started to collect many things to replace what she had lost:  
a hat for every poem she wrote,  
an antique rocking chair for every relative,  
another coat to wrap around her  
even though she knew she would never be warm again.

A police officer brought her back to our house  
so she could get some of her things  
but all she took were pictures of us and our other sister.  
She left behind her cherry tree that the crows always beat her to,  
a large study full of books, the carpet she used to vacuum in straight lines,  
and that basement where my sister took her last breath.

My sisters and I would sleep on the same mattress  
in the middle of the floor when we visited her.  
Our legs would drape over each other,  
arms twisted behind us while my mother would sing us to sleep.

## My Father's Cars

My father never parted  
with his cars  
they stood at attention  
in our driveway

saluting him with sun reflected  
from rusted mirrors  
as he whispered to them,  
*You done good.*

He left a place for her there  
between the Datsun and the Gremlin.  
The gap reflected in his eyes  
as he whispered to us about

honor and discipline  
lined us up  
on our knees praying to God  
*Please bring mommy back.*

He watched as we breathed in unison  
squeezed our hands together tight  
making sure our shoulders  
were always touching.

### Mom with Her Boyfriend

They touch each other  
And stare at each other  
It makes me want to barf  
Joy hates him

Secretly so do I,  
But I try to pretend  
He's nice because  
that is what mom wants



### Every Three Days

One day, two days  
three days now- go  
Mom's house then Dad's house  
we're late for the show

My mom's always yelling  
my dad's yelling too  
the panic is swelling  
it's all I can do

I'm frantically searching under my bed  
for textbooks  
and turtles  
and bazoozelwhoheads

I can't find my t-shirts, I can't find my socks  
I can't find that lipstick that makes me a fox  
Somewhere is homework that isn't quite done  
And somewhere is homework I haven't begun

My sisters are yelling I tell them to stop  
Where the heck did I put my one decent top?  
Into the suitcase goes earrings and hairspray  
tampons, a necklace, a magazine survey.

I know I have a book that is long overdue  
Without fail I can only find one of my shoes  
I'm packing my razor and blue shower cap  
In three days I'm sure I'll need all of this crap

The car has started with everyone inside  
I better get moving before they start to drive  
I know I'm forgetting something I need  
I've had lots of practice, but I never succeed.

### Twelve Minutes

It takes twelve minutes to get from house to house.  
I sit in the front seat with Mom/Dad  
Joy and Lucy in the back with small puffs of fog  
coming out from their open mouths  
their tiny fingers scraping frost off cold windows.

During each trip I feel time freeze  
then reverse.  
Now I'm moving back in time to three days ago  
when I was on this trip going the other direction.  
I carefully rearrange my layers

exposing the one part of myself  
that has been hibernating,  
shoving the other back underneath  
telling it to hush for three days  
when I will take it out, wrinkled, on this very drive.



## Garage Sale Queen

Saturdays at Mom's means waking at six  
 slurping down cereal empty of color and taste  
 while Mom, The Queen, studies the paper  
 making big red circles around ads containing  
 royal words like *collectibles*, *vintage*, *antique*

We do a slow drive by houses with potential  
 Our muffler causing curtains to part and close again  
 She cranes her neck to see if the sale is worth her time.  
 It's very important to show up earlier than the ad says  
*No early birds* becomes invisible to the Queen.

And she can't just sit in the car waiting  
 No, she has to knock on garage doors and ask for a *looksie*  
 If the tired homeowner says no, she will wait, making sure that  
 the little old ladies with snaggly teeth don't cut in front of her.  
 The Queen lays out the game plan with Lucy on her hip

Tells Joy and I what to grab when that garage door  
 slowly screeches open,  
 then elbows an old lady in a walker to get to that unique vase  
 The Queen is not afraid of trying to barter  
 She is not afraid of cramming large items of furniture in our small car

Dear Queen, do we really need another buffet?  
 Another old clock?  
*Yes, yes* she tells us. *We need it.*  
 But no matter how many items she brings back to the house  
 She always looks around and says *something is missing*.

### Things I Can't Tell Mom

\*Dad's house is so dirty I can hear mice in the closet at night

\*I am getting horrible grades

\*I got a detention for skipping band

\*He really believes that you are coming home

than go to the prayer meeting

\*Your friends are weird and freaky

\*I don't believe that you really are as holy as you pretend to be

\*Mom and her boyfriend make fun of you

\*I can hear you crying when you think we're asleep

### Things I Can't Tell Dad

\*I would rather get my homework done



### Dinner at Mom's

Her boyfriend cooks us food with vegetables  
Not just carrots, green beans and potatoes  
But slimy ones. Ones that we have never tasted  
I choke them down or hide them in my napkin  
Joy refuses to even try the lima beans  
Sits at the table late into the night refusing to eat  
He yells and Mom begs and Joy cries  
I sneak into the bathroom to flush away mine.

The Me, at Mom's

At Mom's I have to be  
Witty, sarcastic, smart  
I need to question the system  
And pretend I'm above it all

I am the girl that is liked  
The one that rolls her eyes  
At all the ridiculous things  
That Dad is doing.



## School

the point of school is to stay low  
don't get in their radar  
we all know it's fakity-fake  
but we go along with it anyway  
we know the drill  
pick on the ones weaker than you  
so somehow you can feel better  
about yourself.

### The Pencil Girl

During band I watch her  
While the rest of us slouch low  
draining spit valves and cracking gum  
She plays tall, oboe primly pursed to thin lips  
She is always watching, ready

They call her pencil  
because she is tall and skinny  
She wears jingly, plastic jewel  
bright clothing from second-hand stores  
and always seems to be laughing

This girl sings loudly in the hall  
Doesn't seem to understand  
This isn't how you are supposed to be  
That if only she would be quiet  
She could be cool.

### How We Meet

It is another Saturday with Mom  
And my eyes are still blurry  
While we wait outside another house  
Mom tells me to get what I want  
I grab a painting of happy goldfish

I don't see the colorful pencil girl  
until I am in line to pay  
she is laughing with that mean old lady  
who pokes me in my ribs with sharp elbows  
I am tempted to put the picture back

And go hide out in the car  
But Mom hands me the money  
And runs off to a sale next door  
"Hi, April." she says to me.  
"Hi." I know her name is Beth, but I don't say it.

I throw down the bills my mom left me  
"Did your mom like the painting?"  
She points to the goldfish  
I look down. "No, I do."  
"I painted that" Her smile is so bright  
It blocks out her nickname.



Note Beth passes me the next day

Dear April,

Top 5 reasons why you should spend the night at my house on Friday.

5. I have Dirty Dancing
4. I own a Ouija board that actually works!!
3. I can't wait to spill about my latest crush
2. I make the best caramel corn ever
1. We can sneak out after Mom goes to sleep

## Truth or Dare

I tell her I have had three boyfriends  
That the last one went to second  
base and then he moved away

Beth tells me that she kissed  
one boy and he had  
banana breath

I put her mom's bra on my head

Beth calls a fast food restaurant  
and orders frog legs  
says *get a jump on it*

I tell her I've been to parties  
A lot.  
And I really like drinking beer.

Beth went to a Bob Dylan concert  
With her uncle and smelt something  
that was not cigarette smoke

I tell her I have a ton of friends  
That are much older  
And all live out of town.

Beth does the Chicken Dance  
in front of the window facing the street  
Her back stiff, her arms and hands flailing



## Lists

Beth shows me her notebook of lists  
She has cataloged all of her shoes  
ranked them in order of her favorites  
based on what activity she needs them for

She has ranked the boys in our school  
She includes sub-categories  
based on hotness, niceness  
and future job potential

She lists out her favorite movies with 1-5 stars  
Her dream job before children and after children  
The names she will give her daughter and son  
Where she would like to live, what she will drive

While she shows me her lists  
she asks me what I think about having children  
about where I want to work  
about what boy I think is the best.

I tell her  
I don't know  
I don't know  
I don't know



### My Science Partner

We write back and forth  
On the corners of papers  
To make it look like  
we are taking notes  
Jeff is chubby  
has thick glasses  
curly hair  
But he is really funny  
has lots of friends

## Science Notes

This blows (Jeff writes)

Yeh, it's really boring today (this is me)

Is Mr. J's going to give birth soon?

Not funny.

His baby must be kicking look at him grab his gut.

Stop it.

I'll ask if he's registered for his shower yet.

Put your hand down!!!!!!!!!!

You should have seen your face- lol.

You suck.

What are you doing this weekend?

I don't know- nothing.

You should come hang at Bryce's house on Saturday. His parents are out of town.

I can't.

Please???? It will be fun- we can study Science.

Sorry.

## Saturday Night

They are having fun  
hanging out at a party  
If I was there  
I would be next to Jeff

laughing and smiling  
making new friends  
but I'm home  
letting my sisters brush my hair

while my dad has a prayer meeting  
with his friends  
shouting out hallelujah  
and speaking in tongues

I didn't even ask to go out,  
I already know  
I could never explain my life  
to a boy.

That Monday

In the cafeteria  
Beth yells over to Jeff  
To sit with us.

I am so embarrassed  
I don't even look up  
Hoping he didn't hear her

Jeff ignores his buddies  
And plops right down  
With a huge smile

And from that day on  
The three of us  
Always eat together

Beth at Mom's

She is great at making the adults laugh  
So much that they don't notice  
Joy glaring at Paul  
Or Lucy picking at her food  
She helps me clear the table  
And even dries the dishes  
She doesn't complain when we have  
to go to bed early  
because Paul wants to watch tv.

Beth at Dad's

She knows  
before we can go downstairs  
she has to talk to Dad about God  
knows he will make her  
pray before bed  
knows that dad thinks mom  
is coming home  
but she never  
makes me talk about it

## Fish Stick

It all started with a fishstick.

Beth was convinced that she saw it flip/flop or whatever a fish does when out of the water. "It's alive!" she said, pointing to her greasy tray. We were in the cafeteria.

When you spend every week day lunch crammed together in the cafeteria you become used to crazy assertions.

"What's alive?" I asked.

"The fishstick. It moved," Beth said

"Ew, gross I am never going to eat again." I pushed my food away.

"I'm so sure a fish could survive being cut into a square and then breaded, deep fat fried, packaged hermetically sealed, and then shipped across the world to our school" Jeff said.

"Uh, hermetically sealed? Nice." I gave Jeff a wink.

"No, it's alive- alive I tell you," Beth said. She had been up late studying for her A.P. history exam and her eyes had a glassy sheen. "It's alive and it needs to be free."

She grabbed the five golden sticks from her paper plate and walked out the courtyard, past the hacky sackers, to the little pond. We all laughed and followed her. "Goodbye little fish- swim free" and she plopped them in the water.

She had quite the audience by this time. We clapped.

Mrs. Gates, the cafeteria monitor who looked just like an eel, I'm not even kidding, appeared out of nowhere.

"Young lady, you are going to fish all of those out of there this minute." She snapped.

"Fish!" laughed Jeff.

"This is an outrage!" shouted Beth as she grabbed at the soggy mush.

We figured an afternoon in detention would chill her out like a cool cucumber.

Boy, were we wrong.

## The Email

Subject: We're not going to take it anymore!

From: Beth

To: April, Jeff

We need to take a stand against all that is evil and wrong in the world.

First order of business- our school.

Our first planning meeting will be held tomorrow at 3:30pm(sharp!) in my personal conference room.

April- you are in charge of refreshments (no fish sticks!)

Jeff- you are in charge of musical inspiration- fight the power type of feel.



## The Speech

Beth is the only girl I know who asked for a lectern for Christmas.  
In fact, she is the only girl who calls them lecterns. I call them podiums-  
The things you stand behind when you give a speech-  
but she says a podium is something you stand on instead of behind.  
I didn't believe her until I Wikied it- and, of course, she is right.

So she sets up her lectern in front of her curtains as if she was  
Giving a speech for CNN.  
She is dressed in a polyester suit she found once while we were  
Laughing it up in Goodwill.  
Frankly, she looks a bit like a little dictator.

"People, listen up." Beth gets out her prepared note cards. We all groan.  
"Beth, it is just us, you don't need to give us a speech class presentation" I said  
but she just ignored me and straightened her hair and took a deep breath.  
"Where is the powerpoint presentation?" Jeff whispers to me.  
I don't even tell him that her next request from Santa is a projector.

"Our school is destroying our environment.  
We use plastic spoons and paper plates in the cafeteria.  
We throw away all our paper.  
The air conditioner is on at full blast.  
Do you realize how much energy that is wasting?  
I go to school in the middle of a heat wave in a coat so I don't freeze to death.  
Things have got to change."

She flips over her first card.

"Not to mention our learning environment.  
We are lumps in our chairs.  
We are not thinking and exploring and acting.  
We are sitting in chairs all day long just..... listening."

She slams her fist on the table. Then flips over her second card.  
I make a mental note to steal the notecards so I can see if it  
actually says to *hit table*.

"No wonder so many people are obese.  
We are taught to sit.  
No wonder television is so popular.  
We are brainwashed from a young age  
to not move and not think."

Flip card

“This must stop.  
Things must change.  
I refuse to become...  
a soggy fish stick.”

She flips over her last card.  
We applaud.

## The Name

“Should our group be called Swim Free?” Beth said.

“I liked your battle cry email- We’re not going to take it anymore- isn’t that an old Twisted Sister song?” Jeff said. We shrug.

“The Changers?” I said.

“Eh”

“I got it- ‘Hey teacher, leave them kids alone?’” Jeff said. “Pink Floyd, anyone?” We shake our heads. “Geesh.” Jeff only listens to his dad’s old music so we never get his musical references.

“Fishsticks?” I said.

Duh. We laughed.

Why not?

## Advertising

We decide the best method of advertising for our group  
Is Facebook.

I type up Beth's speech(*hit desk* WAS in her notes!)  
Jeff photoshops a hilarious picture  
of fish sticks carrying protest signs.

We started requesting friends with everyone we know.  
In an hour our group already has 358 friends!

Fishstick's first action to change the world:  
Fight the lunchroom.

### Facebook Note

Title: It's time to fight the evil ways of our cafeteria.

Body: How are we going to do this?

BYOF! Bring Your Own Fork.

We shouldn't be throwing away plastic forks every day.

If you throw a fork away everyday of your whole  
High school career you will throw away:720 forks

If all of us did this that would be 288,000 forks.

Until they bring back real forks,  
we'll bring ours from home.

This Friday we want to see you-  
with a fork in your hand.

### Friday- Fork Day

We walked down the halls  
flashing our forks at each other  
we brought extras and  
hand them out during lunch.

There was a lot of energy in the halls  
And when we got to the lunch room  
We were shocked to see that the  
Plastic forks were all gone.

We are hopeful  
Did someone steal them for our cause?  
But we saw outside  
in the big trashcan someone  
Superglued a giant fork sculpture  
Out of plastic forks

It turned out that everyone joined  
Our Facebook page as a joke  
That they really were just laughing at us

Then, to make matters worse,  
At home I got in trouble because  
we do not have any forks left.  
I tried to eat my spaghetti  
with a spoon.

Next revolution: Meat.

“This was a minor setback-  
you can’t be swayed from  
your revolutionary goals  
it takes awhile to see a change.”

Beth says this from her lectern  
She is a bit fidgety  
you can tell she is talking to herself  
just as much as she is to Jeff and me

“The next topic Fishsticks needs to address  
is the consumption of meat.”  
“What???? Like we all should be vegetarians?  
That is not going to fly” I tell her.

“No, I’m just saying we should eat LESS meat.  
If Americans reduced their meat consumption  
by 10% it would free 12,000,000 tons of grain –  
enough to feed 60,000,000 people.”

That is just one day out of every ten.  
We could have mac and cheese or pancakes  
It doesn’t have to be gross food.  
I bet it would be much better  
Than the dog food they feed us.

## Baloney

So we posted our new Facebook message  
But it was not pretty  
Everywhere we walked  
We got mooed and clucked at.  
Jeff got baloney thrown at him.  
It landed directly on the top of his head  
“Well, the good news,” he said,  
“Is that for all we know,  
baloney isn’t really meat.”  
He started picking it out of his hair.



### Notes in Science Class

You still smell like baloney. (I write)

It's because I'm full of it. (Jeff)

Ha

Do you want to go to a movie this weekend?

Totally

Cool! What movie?

I don't know

How about Freedom?

No- Beth refuses to see that one

Oh. Beth doesn't have to come

Yeah right, she would be so pissed.

Ok.

20 of the 100000000000 reasons why I'll never get a boyfriend

1. My nose is too chubby
2. I'm ALWAYS breaking out
3. My thighs are too fat
4. I wear an A cup
5. I'm not cool
6. I'm not smart
7. I'm not cute
8. I'm not athletic
9. I am not musical
10. I don't have money
11. I'm not artsy
12. I can't tell a joke
13. I have a saggy butt
14. I wear clothes from Goodwill
15. My hair won't stay styled
16. My voice sounds like Mini-Mouse
17. I've never kissed a boy
18. I'm too short
19. I have flat feet
20. I snort when I laugh too hard

## The New Boy

Mrs. Wolly makes him stand  
right in front of our class  
just like they do on bad sitcoms.

He introduces himself  
as Skye from Cali  
says he's into Zen

each girl sighs and twirls hair  
as he moves in easy waves  
to a desk right next to me

I pretend not to notice  
as his ringlets glisten  
even under the florescent

## Zen

At lunch I ask Beth what Zen is.  
She looks around the cafeteria  
watches as Billy Thompson throws

a spoonful of pudding at Sara Smart  
Mike Norton push Eric Wangle  
into a vending machine

She asks me where I like to go to relax,  
where I can kick back and really be me  
away from all the madness

I have to think about that a long time  
I can't come up with a place  
so I lie and tell her my room

Zen, she says, is when you can walk  
around this very high school  
and feel just as calm as you are there.

## Watching

Every time Skye breathes  
I can almost feel it, like a warm breeze.  
The side of my face closest to him  
Burns like he is the sun

I can't look directly at him  
But I've never been more aware  
of someone's movement  
His rhythm is like the ocean

I am so distracted by him  
All I can do is pretend to be fascinated  
With our class. I write down everything  
That anyone says

Mrs. Wolly tells Billy to stop acting  
like a Baboon. I write it down.  
Sara asks the class if someone has a pencil  
And just as I write this down.

I accidentally look up  
At him  
He is looking at my paper  
I try to cover it

Then our eyes meet  
I see that he thinks I'm crazy  
I hope he doesn't know  
he's the reason.

## Fairy Tales

I never wanted to be one of those girls  
that people call *boy-crazy*  
I never wanted to be someone who dreams  
of a happily every after  
My mom tells me over and over

To be independent  
to never to rely on a man  
to not make the same mistakes she has  
And yet, she was the one that read to me  
Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White

Prince Charming saves the day and the girl.  
Now that I'm older, I notice that the prince  
Doesn't rescue girls with big nose and chunky legs.  
My mom wants me to get good grades  
So I can be a scientist she always regrets not being one

She wants to make sure I always pay my own way.  
I know no one is going to save me  
But there are times when I wish there really was a prince  
Not just to save me, but to save all of us

## Big News

They sit us down  
Mom is smiling and so is he.  
She tells us they are getting married.

Joy freaks out

“You are married to Dad in God’s eyes”  
Mom sends her to her room  
Lucy asks, “Do we have to call him Dad?”

Mom tells us to call him Paul.

I don’t say anything.

## Chores

Greg Brown blares from the stereo  
While Mom and Paul two-step on cold tile.  
I organize the dishes in piles  
Wash the glasses first, then the silverware  
Lucy is now dancing with Paul  
Standing on his giant feet and spinning  
Around the kitchen  
Then I do the bowls, and plates  
When the music gets quiet  
I can hear Joy crying in our room  
I wash the pans without changing the water  
It is cold and there are no bubbles left



### Chorus Concert

I told my mom  
she didn't have to come  
That it isn't a big deal  
I don't know why  
it hurts so much  
When I look out  
and can't find her.

## Disaster

Beth and I are standing by my locker  
She is wearing every color in the rainbow  
While she fills me in on how all the girls  
Are swooning over the new guy

I see his hair bopping down the hallway  
He looks over and he waves? At me?  
I just look at him, confused.  
He walks up and says Hi. To me?

Beth nudges me with her sharp elbow.  
I don't say anything.  
She says hi. He looks at me.  
I slam my locker shut and run away.

I am such an idiot.

### He Loves Me- He Loves Me Not

When my dad drops me off at Beth's, she has everything ready. Her palm reading and horoscope books open, her Ouija board and Magic 8 Ball stand ready to be consulted. She even borrowed her mom's wedding ring, hung it on a piece of string to ask it questions while it dangles over my hand. I know my dad would flip out if he saw this, say all of it was from the devil. That scares me a little, but I am desperate.

## Advice

Beth tells me her mom thinks  
I should be bold and talk to Skye  
Her dad thinks I should ask him on a date

I am shocked that she told her parents  
Every detail of my love life  
I tell her I'm going to die of embarrassment

She looks at me strangely  
says, "But they are just my parents  
they know a little about life."

I realize she must tell her parents  
everything  
I wonder which of us is the weird one.

## Save The Earth

When I get to school  
There are these green pieces of paper  
Flapping on classroom doors,  
on peeling hallway walls,

on the make-out lockers  
on the water fountains that are too short  
even for Alex Hunt,  
the shortest kid in school.

The papers read- Wanna make a difference?  
Save our earth? Shake things up?  
Meet in the library after school on Wednesday  
To join Grassroots, an Environmental Club

And there, in the bottom corner,  
Next to a drawing of a windmill,  
Was his name

Skye.

Beth is Pissed.

Who does he think he is?

We ALREADY have an environmental group.

He just thinks he can come in here and own the place

And what a waste of paper!!!!

Emergency Fishstick meeting

She slams her locker because she is so pissed.

April, We are so over him.

## The Note

I am late to class  
Seriously considered skipping  
When I do sit down, Skye tries to say something  
but Mrs. Wolly is in a pissy mood  
and gives both of us one of her special looks

I don't look over at him  
Basically I feel like throwing up  
I get out my notebook to write and write  
I try to turn off the voice in my head screaming at me  
That my life is over

And then it comes sailing over from his direction  
A piece of paper folded in fourths  
It's a note. I stare at it, frozen.  
Do I ignore it? Do I read it right in front of him?  
I can't stand the suspense so I slowly unfold the page.

*April- I noticed that you like to take notes*  
*I'm starting up a group and we need a secretary*  
*Could you do it? Peace, Skye*  
I nod over at him. One up and one down, my face red.  
Oh. My. God. He knows my name.

What I tell Beth

I am going to go there  
and see what they are doing  
Kind of like a spy.  
It's going to be so lame.

She rolls her eyes at me.



## The Meeting

Attendance: 26(1 boy 25 girls)

Skye: Thanks for coming today. I am glad to see that there are so many people concerned about the environment. This issue is one very close to my heart

(All girls sigh)

Do any of you have ideas we want to address as a group? Any concerns about things going on in this school?

(All girls sigh)

Well, um, some things I think we can look at is starting up a recycling program.

We could set up boxes in each classroom and sort through the paper every couple of weeks.

Who would like to be on that committee?

(All girls raise their hands)

Cool

What about planting some trees outside, it is really drab around here and I think it would help shade the school. Would anyone want to be on that committee?

(All girls raise their hands)

Great

Um, do you ladies ever talk?

Why?

After the cheerleader girls  
And the science club girls  
And the cute girl in a short skirt  
All finally left

I handed the meeting notes  
To Skye. He rubbed his eyes  
And plopped down in a chair  
Then he smiled at me

I wanted to run away  
But a question just popped out of my mouth  
*So why do you like the environment?*  
He looked down at his scuffed Birkenstocks

*I want to make a difference in the world  
But I guess, to be honest,  
when things are falling apart around me,  
it's a place where I can find peace.*

## Phone Call

I can tell it is Mom on the phone  
Just by watching Dad  
I can tell she is telling him her news  
I can tell this by the way he is pacing  
By the way he runs his hand through his hair  
by the way he keeps clearing his throat  
By the way that his voice goes up  
at the end of his sentences  
I can also tell that I don't want to be there  
When he hangs up.

## Outside

Before Sara died and mom left  
We would play outside in the yard  
Dad would mow the lawn  
Mom would plant the garden

Now the weeds and grass are taking over  
The ditches are overgrown  
Small green snakes slither  
Under fallen branches and broken boards

In fairy tales one message stands out  
Loud and clear- I should not be outside alone  
Evil things are trying to get me out there  
Little Red and Hansel and Gretel warned me

But now I need to get away  
I pull up my little red cape  
And follow the bread crumbs  
Away from the real danger inside.

## Winter Prairie

The wind is blowing me out towards the prairie  
I can hear my feet scrunching in the snow  
It makes me think of eating the kind of cereal  
that stays hard even after you put milk on it.  
The trees' leafless branches wildly striking each other  
seem to be applauding me as I walk by  
Crows are cawing out as if they are mad and lonely  
I feel stupid out here because nothing is happening  
I notice some tracks in the snow- I think they are rabbits  
And there are some tiny poop pellets. Gross.  
I like how the snow clings to dead plants  
I wish I had a notebook so I could draw a picture of them  
I realize that I'm not used to being alone  
That I don't really know how to act  
when I'm away from being judged

## Chaos

When I come back inside  
Dad is yelling at me before I shut the door  
My sisters are both crying

The girls were trying to cheer Dad up by making  
Him cards but now there is paint all over their clothes  
And the carpet is covered in glitter. I want to laugh

But I look at dad and stop  
I remember who I'm supposed to be  
And run to clean it all up

Let's Go!

At school there are new posters on the walls  
This time in sparkling bubble letters  
Recycle, Ride a Bicycle  
Gooo Earth!!  
Hug a Tree- Yippee  
Skye was standing in the middle of the hallway  
His face matching the cement walls  
I really should have warned him when  
the cheerleaders volunteered to make signs

## Makeover

I've watched every makeover show on tv  
I know what pants make my legs slimmer  
Which shoes make my figure look curvier  
Where to put my blush to enhance my cheekbones  
But never have I seen a makeover show  
that will turn me into an earthy-hippy girl.  
At home, before Dad comes home,  
I am the make-over star  
We take out all the old clothes mom left behind  
Joy puts together my outfits,  
Lucy yells out judging scores for each look  
I strut into the living room,  
twirl and make a peace sign.



## Her News

I think Dad will change  
when Mom gets married  
That we will stop praying  
for her to come home

But he only prays harder  
At night he makes us pray  
Until the girls fall asleep  
And has to carry them to bed

Even later at night  
I can hear him crying  
I put my pillow over my head  
and cry, too.

## Grassroots

At the next meeting, nine girls  
including me, were wearing Birkenstocks  
it seems that they, too, were the stars  
of their own earthy-hippy makeover

Skye is running around to different groups  
making sure people are making progress  
Complimenting ideas and smiling and smiling  
At every single girl

## Phone number

Skye wants to meet with me  
Sometime during the weekend  
So we can research wind farms  
Asks me for my cell.  
I don't have one.  
I write down my mom's number  
My hand shaking a little  
because I'm so excited  
Only after he gets on his bus,  
I remember  
we're going to Dad's tomorrow

### Waiting for the phone

I tell mom not to leave the house but if she does she has to leave the machine on and has to check the machine the minute she gets home and then she has to call me and let me know exactly what Skye says. I wait by the phone even though I don't want to be that girl, I am, and each time it rings, I freak myself out.

It's a boy

Joy grabs the phone before I can get to it  
And then announces loudly  
It's for April and it's a booooooooooy  
I grab it out of her hand  
And she and Lucy start screaming  
It's a boy it's a boy it's a boy boy boy  
While twirling and waving their arms in the air  
It's only Jeff.

### Cool Cara

We ride the same bus  
She sits in the back  
And sings along with  
scurvy boys to loud rock songs

She tells jokes that she hears  
From watching comedians on cable  
talks and laughs with everyone,  
Not just her snotty friends

She puts herself down  
Even though she is the cutest  
With braces and long blond hair  
cute little skirts and pink lip gloss

One day she doesn't sit in the back  
But sits next to me and starts talking  
I just stare at her and wonder  
If this is a big joke

## The Plan

Before Cara asked me over to her house  
the plan was to go to Beth's  
So that we could celebrate her half birthday

Her mom was going to make her a half cake  
I was going to give her a half gift.  
a necklace with half a heart saying *best*

matching my half of a heart saying *friends*  
it was a little cheesy  
but I knew she would like it

### In a Raspy Voice

I'm sick and my sisters are sick  
And we can't even get out of bed  
And it wouldn't be good to come over  
I hope that we can have the party  
A different time  
You are the best friend  
anyone could ever ask for.



Unhappy

Cara has straight

As

Her parents let her stay out  
late

All the boys think she's  
hot

But she despises  
school

Thinks the town is a  
drag

Hates putting up with all the  
shit

She just wants to  
split

## Smoking

Cara smokes

Marlboro reds

Inhale one two three

Exhale one two three

Gently tap the ash

with pointer finger

look far into the distance

run hand through hair

sigh

## Crush

She asks me about  
Skye on an exhale.  
I know  
just like that,  
I don't have  
a chance.

## Lies

When Beth sees me at school  
I am practicing my scowl  
It can't be a real unhappy look  
It has to be pretend  
Because that is cooler  
*You must really be sick*  
Beth says to me  
My tummy starts to feel tight  
I practice my pretend smile  
And don't meet her eye

## Piñata

I'm so afraid  
That if my  
parents and  
sisters and  
teachers and  
friends  
keep knocking  
into me  
All my lies  
will come  
popping  
out

### In the Woods

I steal cigarettes  
from mom's boyfriend  
practice smoking them  
as prettily as Cara

They hurt my throat  
make me feel jittery  
so I start gathering sticks  
And tepee them

like the fires on tv  
I pretend I'm stuck in the woods  
and have to fend for myself  
try and try to light the branches

Use leaves and blow gently  
Smoke appears in small puffs  
I feel stupid and alone  
Know I wouldn't survive.

The stream

The snow has melted  
So the water is rushing  
over itself to move

out of town and away  
from where it was  
so rudely dropped

My dad told me that the water  
on the bottom moves the slowest  
Because there is so much friction

I always wanted to be the water  
on the top  
Carefree and somersaulting

Racing quickly forward  
towards my future

Fallout at Fishstick meeting

Beth is ready to give her speech  
 She is wearing her shiny lip gloss  
 And is smoothing her hair

“We use entirely too much paper in our school  
 The paper industry is one of the highest consumers  
 of energy and water. If you reduce the amount of paper  
 you will have less pollution, less energy use and  
 less trees cut down.

Recycling is not enough.  
 I propose we only use one piece  
 Of paper at school a day  
 We can write small and conserve space.”

I interrupt- “What is the point?  
 If we post this on Facebook  
 by tomorrow morning  
 All of our houses will be TPed

“I see” Beth says. Her face is red.  
 “Oh but all the girls- including you-  
 Will listen to Skye  
 I’m sure you wouldn’t interrupt him.”

Now I feel my face get red.  
 “Fine, you two can make fools of yourself  
 In stupid t-shirts tomorrow  
 But I’m out.”

She called three times that night.  
 I had Joy tell her I was in bed.



Science notes with Jeff

Jeff shows up to class  
wearing his latest design:  
Hug a Tree  
Not a trash can

You really think my t-shirts are dumb?(Jeff Writes)  
No. Sorry.(I write)  
So you were wrong about them TPing my house  
Thank goodness.  
They did get my locker.  
I bet Beth is sooo pissed.  
No. She doesn't care about that  
She wouldn't  
She does care about you- you should talk to her.  
No.

### Skirt Buds

Even though it isn't  
really all that warm,  
when the first nice day  
shows its face  
and birds other than crows  
start to sing  
it means that all over school  
the skirts are going to appear  
these are not  
full-grown skirts  
just the beginnings  
like the tiny buds  
on the trees  
so small and delicate  
that they disappear  
when girls bend over.

## Facing

Dad's friend Larry  
hired me to work at the grocery store  
He knows Dad from the prayer meeting,  
When I work there I "face the shelves  
Dad thinks it will teach me discipline  
Like he isn't doing that already  
When I work I'm in charge of  
Lining up all the cans and boxes  
in the front of the shelves  
So they are facing out all in nice neat rows  
labels begging you to buy them  
it is hard to watch people pick things off of  
the neat and tidy shelves  
I want to scream at them to admire my artistry  
To admire the colors  
But so often they will mix up the rows  
Looking at one can  
And then putting it back label  
facing the inside of the self.

Harry

I forgot my nametag so now I'm "Sylvia"  
the lady that is out because she had a baby  
I decide to check out the new lobster tank  
am tapping on the glass and saying *hello* out loud  
when I see Skye's reflection in the tank  
he is standing directly behind me and I dart up and spin  
he looks down at my nametag and gives me a weird look  
*Are these your pets?* He is so cute with all those waves  
of blond hair hanging in his eyes and his strong tan arms  
*Yeh- that one is named Harry.* I point to the biggest lobster  
He smiles at me quickly  
*So where can I find some tofu in this store?*

## Recycling Program

Skye is bored with recycling  
We all are, really.  
Each week we collect the recycling boxes  
From each classroom  
And then filter through all the paper  
No one really pays attention to the sign  
That says no trash, colored paper, staples.  
Maybe if the sign said trash, colored paper,  
Staples, we would get plain white paper  
Ready to go to the recycling center  
Each time a girl would find a dirty Kleenex  
Or a piece of used gum she would scream  
And gag  
And Skye would roll his eyes  
Pace around the room  
And scheme.

## PETA

He made an announcement.

*We need to stir things up around here.*

The cheerleaders said *We could make more signs with even more glitter!*

*No- we really need to fight the power* Skye slams his fist into his hand

He really means business

*Like PETA?* Cara asks, she is smiling at Skye,

Skye shouts yes! at Cara- *Like PETA!*

*What is PETA?* Sally asks from the back

*People for the ethical treatment of animals* Cara says smugly.

*Oh yeh, so we could dump paint on people wearing fur or something?*

*But where are people wearing fur in spring?* Sally asks,

She is always good at thinking things through.

*What animals are being mistreated?* Skye asks

*Can you think of any animal April?*

And then I know he's talking about Harry and I don't know

If I should feel excited he's pointed me out, or nervous.

The discussion

Skye says:

I think we should free the lobsters  
Being penned against their will at  
the grocery store

Girls

The Girls say:  
Ew, lobsters freak me out

I hear they scream when people boil  
them alive

No they don't, that's a myth

It's creepy that people crack open  
their bodies and suck out their  
insides

I think they look kinda happy in  
there swimming around the tank

How are we going to get the  
lobsters?

Oh we'll get them, don't worry  
(He winks at me.)

What are we going to do with them  
once we get them?

We'll return them to their natural  
Home

How?

We'll put them in the river-  
All water leads to the sea.

Oh.

### The Lobster Heist

He wanted to steal it  
Because he felt that paying for it  
Would somehow be unethical

So he found out when I was working  
And then came up to me in the store  
And asked loudly if I would assist him

In the meat department  
I help him fish Harry out of the tank  
He has a cloth bag waiting

He tells me to stop by the park when I get off  
Then starts running out of the store  
Yelling at the top of his lungs that he is freeing

A small life from unethical treatment  
Everyone just watches him go. Confused.  
After he leaves, they look at each other and shrug.

I get called into the office  
The manager asks me who the boys was  
I look down at the speckles on the tile

Tells me that he is really disappointed in me  
Tells me that what I'm doing isn't Jesus-like  
Tells me that I'm fired.



## Outside

Skye is standing by the river  
He is holding his hand and when I get  
Closer I see that he is bleeding  
“I shouldn’t have taken off those bands”  
On the bank I see that is Harry.  
“I guess lobsters really don’t like fresh water” He says.  
“I guess not” I say  
“I don’t either. If only I was back home  
I really could have saved him.”  
It looks like he’s going to cry  
As he runs his hands through his hair  
“At least he wasn’t some fat guy’s supper” I say  
He smiles

### Sympathy

The next day all the girls  
Circle around him  
Cooing over his hurt finger

Telling him he is so brave  
for rescuing the helpless animal.  
I guess he's not going to tell them

about how I lost my job  
about how Harry died anyway.  
about almost crying

I want to tell someone  
the whole thing was a big joke  
but just sit back and take notes

### Snub

Beth tries to talk to me by my locker  
I just slam the door and walk away.

### Science Notes

I know you are STILL fighting with Beth  
but we should still go to a movie.(Jeff writes)

Ok(I write)

Ok?

Sure

Cool

### The New Plan

Skye wants to keep stirring things up in town  
*Why don't we free another animal that is being mistreated*  
He doesn't look over at me this time  
*This time, why don't we free something that could live*  
*Out in the wild*  
*Roam in the woods and forage for food on its own.*  
The girls call out guesses *A bear? A rabbit? A bird?*  
*No, we are going to free a boar!*  
*What is that?* A girl asked  
*A male pig.*

## Hog Confinement

There is a pig lot just outside of town. I don't know much about it except it is the smelliest thing ever. When one of our parents drive by it in the car my sisters hold their noses and I hold my breath hoping to not get that stench sucked into my lungs. The car will hold the smell long after we pass the long white buildings holding dark shadows. One time Joy asked my dad how many pigs were in there. He said one barn might hold around 500 pigs. There are six barns. You can hear manic squealing as you drive by that sounds way more scary than any horror movie. Those places are evil. It's not just how they look, or the smell and the sounds. It is a feeling that runs even deeper where you just know that it is bad news.

### Skye's Plan

I was hoping it would be impossible  
That we wouldn't be able to get past  
The high fence that surrounded the lots  
But Skye staked the place out  
Figured out which worker didn't lock the gates  
When he went on his hour break  
And so at the next meeting of Grassroots  
Skye is jumping up and down and drawing  
His "game plan" while the girls giggle  
I pray I will be brave enough  
To not go.

Another lie

I call Jeff that night and tell him that  
My dad won't let me go.  
He says he understands.  
But he doesn't sound happy.



## The Night

I ride my bike to meet them  
They are across the street  
from the glowing white buildings  
Most are wearing black outfits  
Even though it isn't exactly dark out  
Sara even brought a Halloween mask  
just in case there are cameras  
all the girls are shrieking, smiling,  
and holding their noses  
Skye brought his dog, Greenie,  
He is pulling on his leash toward the buildings  
The only one of us that really seems to want  
To cross the road.

### Here We Go

I feel the way I do when I'm about to lie to someone  
The kind of lie that I just know I will be caught in  
The kind that I continue to make- just because  
I am crossing the street with Skye, eight girls  
Toward a smelly, set of buildings full of giant pigs  
I have goose bumps and am shaking  
I look back at Greenie tied up to a tree across the street  
And wish we could trade places.

### Close Your Eyes

We tie bandanas around our mouths  
Inside are long rows of giant pigs in little cages  
Like they are in prison  
They don't have any room to move  
can't walk even a step inside their bars  
Can hardly even lay down  
Underneath the pigs is a grate  
You can see poop and pee sitting under them  
And mice running around the concrete floors  
Girls scream when they see them  
Sara asks Skye when they let the pigs out  
To walk around, to breathe.  
Skye says never.  
Never? They are stuck in little cages  
their whole life? And then we eat them?  
Sara starts crying. I want to throw up.

### Eating Time

All of a sudden, as if an alarm goes off,  
The pigs begin squealing and freaking out  
Loudly  
I scream with them  
But can't hear myself  
because they are so loud  
Some girls run out of the building  
I cover my ears but it doesn't help  
Skye is searching around  
As if there is a switch to turn them off  
Then there is a giant mechanical sound  
and food drops down into their stalls  
I scream again  
Then it is so quiet  
all I can hear is the rattle of cages  
and grunting of pigs eating

### Piglets

In the other end of the barn  
there were little baby pigs  
in pens next to their moms  
The girls that didn't run away  
laughed at them  
leaned over their cages  
to pet their soft ears  
play with their cute tails

### The Boar Barn

Skye couldn't find his boar  
he asked me to look in other barns  
the next barn had pigs  
that made the other ones small  
Skye was pleased he found them  
But because there so many  
He had to choose which boar  
To set free  
These animals were huge  
And they did not look nice  
I wanted to tell Skye  
to go free the piglets  
they were young,  
they had their whole lives  
ahead of them

### The Wrong Way Around

Skye told me to get the other girls. And so I ran around the barn the other way. It was getting darker and I could see the moon. Close to the door was a big bucket- the kind we would set up to play kick the can on summer nights. I loved the feeling of running at full speed to give the bucket a solid kick. I got nearer and saw that there was something in it and I knew I didn't want to look. I knew I should turn around and go the other way around. But my body kept moving toward the bucket and the shadows surrounding it. Inside the bucket were baby pigs. Necks turned at odd angles, legs spread and overlapping each other. Flies buzzing around their eyes.

## Shock

I ran back to Skye  
To tell him about the piglets  
To tell him we needed to leave  
But what I saw in the barn  
Was worse than the bucket  
Skye was leaning over  
Petting the big boar  
I knew it was dumb thing to do  
To believe the giant pig eight times his size  
would like anyone touching him  
but I didn't say anything  
I watched the boar  
Jump up, ram its huge body  
into my friend  
watched as Skye sailed back  
head slam against the rail  
watched myself run over to him  
his arm at an angle that  
arms shouldn't be  
blood from his head dripping  
between the grates  
The boar banging into the bars  
still trying to get at us.



## The Big Mess

I called for help  
And it came quickly  
A fire truck,  
three police cars,  
an ambulance  
a tv reporter  
the hog lot owner  
and all of our parents  
By the time he was being  
carted away in the ambulance  
Sky was smiling at the camera.  
I was so glad that he didn't die  
I was smiling too  
Even with Mom and Dad glaring at me  
The funniest part was when Skye's dog, Greenie,  
Escaped from his leash  
accidentally jumped in a lagoon of poop  
She came up to all of us,  
the police, the reporter in a nice suit,  
The hog lot owner glaring,  
and shook her soaking body.  
We all screamed.  
Every single one of us  
was covered in smelly,  
sloppy pig poop

### Our talk

That night  
Dad and I finally talk  
about everything.  
I tell him how hard it  
Is to call mom's house  
The house that mom  
Rents  
And how I am not whole.  
I cry a lot  
So does he  
But I have to  
Let him know  
I am split.  
Just like him.

### A Small Change

The next day  
Dad says to us  
*It's time to go  
to your mom's house.*  
We all freeze.  
He never calls it Mom's house.  
Joy says,  
*The house that mom rents*  
Dad ignores her.

### The Necklace

I stick an envelope  
in Beth's locker  
with this note:

Dear Beth,  
Without you  
I'm missing half  
of my heart.  
Love, April

I give her  
The half of a heart  
necklace with  
The word *best*  
Written on it

BFF

The next day Beth  
Comes up to me  
I'm so scared I want  
To run away  
But then I see it  
She's wearing her half  
Of her necklace  
I hug her so hard

Science Class

Every day I write him  
the same note

I'm sorry.

Every day he pretends  
Not to see.

## The Call

Even though I'm grounded  
Joy sneaks me the phone  
Whispering *it's a boooooooy*  
And then quietly waves her  
Arms in the air and twirls.

Lucy must have the ears of  
A bat because she appears out  
Of nowhere to join in  
*It's a boy boy boy*  
It's just Skye.

He says he's sorry.  
Says he's an idiot.  
Asks if there is anything he  
can do to make it up to me.  
I tell him there is.

### Fishstick Meeting

I bring Skye to the next Fishstick meeting  
Jeff doesn't even look at me  
Skye sits while Beth goes on and on  
About Fossil fuels and global warming  
He Sits while she flips her cards  
Sits while she bangs her fist on the table  
For added emphasis  
And then stands to clap louder and longer  
Than the rest of us  
He looks at her with such admiration  
They start planning  
And fighting  
Over what our group should do  
to combat the problem  
completely ignoring Jeff and me.

I look over at Jeff  
"I know I blew it," I say. "But  
if you give me another chance I promise  
I'll never ever stand you up again  
for a bunch of pigs."

He doesn't laugh.



## Kiss

I walk out of the room  
Out of the house  
And down the street  
I start to cry

I hear something behind me  
I turn around and it's Jeff  
Out of breath.  
He doesn't say anything  
But I know

He leans in  
I'm too freaked out  
To do anything.  
He presses his lips to mine

I only remember  
to close my eyes  
after he is done.  
Then I keep them closed.

"Are you okay?" he asks  
"Yes"  
"Why are your eyes closed?"  
"It's just what I do when I get kissed"

He laughs.  
"Oh, so you get kissed a lot,  
I take it?"  
"Not yet."

He kisses  
me again.  
This time  
I kiss back.

### Fishstick's Success

With Skye as head of publicity  
Our next event: *bike, skate, walk, swim,*  
*skip, dance, jive your way to school*  
Was a complete success.

Most of the school actually didn't  
Drive and everyone had fun  
Even Mrs. Gates, the eel cafeteria lady  
wore white roller skates with pink wheels

### Mom and Paul's Wedding

It's at home  
With only family and  
A few friends  
Joy, Lucy and I have new dresses  
Paul's friend plays the accordion  
We all dance  
Even Joy and Paul  
It's colorful and bright  
And it feels like a new start

It's a Girl!

I answer the phone  
"Hello, April, this is Barb,  
is your dad home?"  
Barb is a woman from church  
She goes to mass every day.  
I notice that Dad gets nervous  
When he talks to her.  
"Sure, hang on," I tell her.  
I yell as loud as I can  
"Dad it's a girrrrrrrrrrrrl"  
Dad and Joy and Lucy all come running to the phone  
Dad grabs it from my hand and the three of us  
Start dancing with our arms in the air twirling  
Singing, "It's a girl, it's a girl, it's a girl."